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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 000178

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [CA](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: CANADIAN POSITION ON IRAQ UNCHANGED

REF: (A) OTTAWA 49 (B) 02 OTTAWA 3502

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stephen R. Kelly,
Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Despite Prime Minister Chretien's January 15 comment that "the international community must speak and act through the UN Security Council," Canada's position on military participation in a potential war against Iraq is unchanged. Contacts at Foreign Affairs and National Defense assured us on January 16 that the Canadian response to our request for a military contribution (given to the State Department in December - reftels) remains the same: Canada will participate militarily if there is a UN-sanctioned campaign, and reserves judgement on participation if there is no explicit UNSC authorization.

2. (C) Defense Minister McCallum made this position - including the possibility that Canada would participate in a campaign not endorsed by the UN - very clear in a press conference following his January 9 meeting with Secretary Rumsfeld, to the consternation of the left wing of the ruling Liberal Party. Several backbench Liberal MPs complained afterward that Canada should only support military action blessed by the UNSC, and some called for debate in Parliament on the Canadian position. The Prime Minister, who never likes to commit himself earlier than necessary on controversial issues, was not pleased. He told the press that McCallum "replied to a hypothetical question that he has reflected upon and corrected since that time." Chretien reaffirmed McCallum's statement that Canada would participate in a UNSC-blessed operation, but refused to speculate on whether Canada would join a campaign not endorsed by the UN.

3. (C) McCallum, a professional economist who became Defense Minister in May 2002 and was first elected to Parliament in 2000, is still learning the ropes of Cabinet politics, including the finer points of obfuscating before the media. He violated one of Chretien's basic rules - not to infringe upon the Prime Minister's room for maneuver - and was put down for his efforts. We continue to believe that Canada would join a coalition of the willing in a campaign against Iraq, even if the Security Council were divided, but that Chretien would prefer to avoid having to make that politically tough decision.
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